

Hundreds turn out in San Rafael to debate long-range Bay Area growth plan

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Marin residents had their largest venue yet Monday night to speak their mind on a long-range transportation and land-use/housing blueprint for the Bay Area that has attracted both vocal opponents and supporters.

The Marin Center in San Rafael, which holds about 340 people, was filled with people who came to state their views on the draft version of Plan Bay Area.

The plan, which uses population and jobs projections through 2040, is a collaboration of four regional government agencies. It was developed largely as a response to the California Sustainable Communities and Climate Protection Act of 2008, which requires each of the state's 18 metropolitan areas to reduce greenhouse gas emissions from cars and light trucks.

The plan seeks to channel 80 percent of housing growth and 66 percent of the job growth in "priority development areas." These are areas typically accessible to mass transit, jobs, shopping and other services that have been identified and approved by local cities or counties for future growth. Local jurisdictions that approve priority development areas will be rewarded with grant money.

The city of San Rafael has approved two planned development areas, and four other potential sites have been identified in other parts of Marin.

Some Marin residents, most notably a coalition of neighborhood groups calling itself Citizen Marin, have vehemently opposed the Plan Bay Area process from the start. They assert that it robs local jurisdictions of control over land-use decisions and will result in high-density apartment developments that will damage Marin's pristine natural environment and small-town character.

But another group of Marin residents, Concerned Marinites to End NIMBYism, have defended Plan Bay Area, asserting that opponents of the plan are really worried that the creation of higher-density, more affordable housing will attract lower-income, more ethnically diverse residents to the county.

And the people who spoke Monday night voiced a similar range of opinion.

"Plan Bay Area represents the single largest plan for high-density development perhaps in the history of Marin," said Sausalito Councilwoman Linda Pfeifer.

Linda Rames of Mill Valley said, "It is full of inaccuracies and inadequacies."

Guy Meyer of San Rafael said, "Increasing density, increasing population, lowers the quality life. That's my opinion."

Several opponents asserted a connection between Plan Bay Area and Agenda 21 a non-binding, voluntarily action plan of the United Nations related to sustainable development.

James Bennett of Santa Rosa said, "This is about good old-fashioned oppression with all its earmarks — U.N. globalists that are behind this plan, and we can connect the dots. After studying Agenda 21 for eight years I'm starting to learn how it works."

Kay Tokerud of Santa Rosa said, "I want to reiterate; this plan does follow the U.N. Agenda 21 model." Tokerud said she is a member of the Post Sustainability Institute, a think tank established to educate citizens about U.N. Agenda 21.

Right-wing conspiracy theorists have propagated theories that Agenda 21 is a strategy for the United Nations to create a one-world government and take away the rights of local property owners; pundits such as Glenn Beck and Rush Limbaugh have helped spread the word.

Proponents at Monday's meeting focused on the need for more affordable housing.

"Marin County needs affordable housing," said Cathy Cortez of Tiburon, a member of Marin Action Coalition for Equity. Cortez noted that there are 8,000 households in Marin on a waiting list for low-income Section 8 housing vouchers.

Elizabeth Moody of Mill Valley said, "With 60 percent of our workers living in other counties having the longest auto commutes in the Bay Area and building up greenhouse gases with their travel, I strongly support the One Bay Area Plan."

Angela Gott, a Marin County senior, said she worries whether she will be able to afford to continue living in Marin on a monthly Social Security check totaling \$1,184.

"I'm very concerned about whether there is any place for me in this new plan," Gott said. "I really need senior subsidized housing. I don't want to move. I don't want to be pushed out."

Vinh Luu, who spoke on behalf of a group of Vietnamese refugees who settled in Marin, said, "After all, fair and affordable housing is a human right."

Monday night's meeting was designed as a forum for Marin residents to discuss the plan; but public meetings also are being held throughout the Bay Area on the environmental impact report for the plan; a hearing on the impact report was held April 16 in San Rafael.

The impact report contains four alternatives in addition to a "project" alternative, on which Plan Bay Area is based. The alternative that opponents of the plan seem to favor is the "no project" alternative.

Luke Teyssier of Tamalpais Valley said, "I am opposed to the Plan Bay Area; but if you insist, I support the no action plan."

According to the impact report the "no project" alternative assumes continued growth in suburban and exurban locations and would lead to higher levels of congestion and more miles of driving each day.

Another alternative, however, would result in more low-income housing development than the project alternative. This "environment, equity and jobs" alternative, was developed with input from equity and environmental groups such as Public Advocates, Urban Habitat and TransForm. It seeks to maximize affordable housing in job-rich, urban and suburban areas through incentives and housing subsidies.

The suburban growth would be supported by increased transit service to historically disadvantaged communities. The beefed up transit service would be paid for with higher bridge tolls and a new "vehicle miles traveled" tax; such a tax could be levied by installed a Global Positioning System device in all Bay Area vehicles.

According to the impact report, this alternative has the strongest transit ridership of all of the alternatives and lowest level of vehicle miles traveled.

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